

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 – June 12, 2022 (Trinity Sunday)

Why do we teach the Trinity? I mean, obviously, we confess that it's true. But why do we make an effort to teach it? Why bother trying to explain one God in three persons?

Because, frankly, it's not something you're going to wrap your head around. We try to make analogies for the Trinity, but they're all flawed. Every one of them is inadequate and misleading. We try to confess what Scripture confesses, like we just did in the Athanasian Creed. But, as you probably noticed, that gets really long and really boring really fast.

And there's probably at least a few people here wondering if it actually matters. Do we even need to know how to confess the Triune God? Doesn't the Bible say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved"? So that's all that matters. Believe in Jesus. Everything else is just extra. Icing on the cake.

Well... not really. It's true that faith in Jesus Christ is the central component of the Christian faith. But it's also problematic to say that all you need is to believe in Jesus. Because at the core of that statement is another question: Who is Jesus?

If you're going to put your faith in someone or something, you need to know something about them. If a complete stranger off the street walked up to you and said, "Follow me to my house and I'll give you a million dollars." You'd probably turn and walk the other direction. If a complete stranger pulled up to your child and said, "Get into my car and I'll buy you an ice cream cone." You'd call the police.

So now Jesus comes up to us and says, "Put your faith in me and I'll give you eternal life." How should we respond? If we don't know who Jesus is, that offer is at best meaningless. The Easter bunny might as well be hopping up to us offering eternal life.

And at worst, it's a pretty dubious attempt at getting us to sacrifice our lives for an uncertain reward. So it's all well and good to say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." But a faith in Jesus that isn't resting on a firm assurance of who he is... is pretty empty.

We have to know who Jesus is. And more than that, we have to believe that Jesus is God incarnate and yet different from God the Father. Or our faith starts to fall apart. Because, on the one hand, we've got the Old Testament. Telling us over and over again, "The Lord our God is one." And, in fact, St Paul reiterates that in the New Testament too: "There is one God and Father of all."

And yet, on the other hand, here we have Jesus in the Gospel lesson. Describing himself not as the Father, but as the Son, and very distinctly different from the Father because of that. Well, if there is one God and one Father – and Jesus is not the Father – then does that mean Jesus is not God? And if He's not God, then by what authority is he promising me eternal life? And where does he get off telling me to put my faith in him?

That's the slippery slope that you can easily end up on. That's the dangerous place that we can end up if we don't know how to confess the Trinity. If we don't know why we need to confess the Trinity.

So let's take a look at this Gospel lesson and really examine how Jesus describes His relationship with the Father. Jesus is arguing with the Jewish authorities. And they're kind of going back and forth insulting each other. The Jews start this argument by saying that Jesus is a demon possessed Samaritan, which is a double insult. Jesus replies by calling them liars who don't know God at all. It's getting rather heated. And by the end, they're ready to stone Jesus on the spot.

But in the midst of this Jesus tells them that if they really knew God, then they would support His work. Because His work is something that even Abraham rejoiced in seeing. And that's something they can't understand at all. How can a 33 year old man claim to have seen Abraham? How can a guy who's not even 50 years old claim to have met a guy who's been dead for 2000 years. And so Jesus makes it clearer to them. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."*

I Am. The very name that God used for Himself on Mt Sinai. In Hebrew, it's Yahweh. And it literally means, "I am who I am." In fact, the very title "Lord Jesus" points directly to the Lord of the Old Testament. When you proclaim "Jesus Christ is Lord," by the power of the Holy Spirit, you proclaim, "Jesus is Yahweh." Jesus is God. The one, true, and only God.

How can this be? How can the son be the same as and equal to the father? I don't know. I can't explain it. But I think our Old Testament lesson gives us a clue. For in this description of the wisdom of God, we see an image built of the Son of God.

Which makes sense in a way. How is the wisdom of God any different than the Word of God? One is God's plan. The other is God expressing and carrying out that plan. It's the same concept. And since Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, then this is really talking about Jesus himself.

And so in Proverbs 8, we read these words, "*The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*" Now at first glance, it seems like this is saying that Jesus is a creation. Something less than God.

And yet, take note of those words, "at the first, before the beginning of the earth." The Son is a work of the Father, but he's not a part of creation. He was there before creation. Before the Father made anything, Jesus was there. "Ages ago" he was there. Other translations say "from eternity" Jesus was there.

At the beginning of creation, the Father was there, ordering all things. At the beginning of creation, the wisdom of God was there, speaking light into existence. At the beginning of creation, the Spirit of God was there, hovering over the face of the deep and breathing life into mankind.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All there "before the beginning." All there "ages ago"... "from eternity." And yet, somehow, the Son is "begotten." And somehow, the Spirit does "proceed from the Father and the Son." How is this possible? I haven't a clue.

But that's not necessarily a bad thing. I remember teaching a confirmation class a few years ago. And a question came up that was fundamentally Trinitarian. You could not answer the question without using the doctrine of the Trinity. And so we had a nice little recap of what we confess regarding the Trinity and how it applied. And the student who had asked the question repeated everything back to me perfectly.

And I said, "Yup. You've got it." And they said, "That makes absolutely no sense." And you know how I replied? "Good. It shouldn't make sense."

If it made sense, then I would be worried. If it made sense, then you probably would have been trying to use one of those terrible analogies that I'm always railing against. You probably would have been off in left field in some sort of heresy. But if you can confess it and it's still a paradox and it still doesn't make any sense, but it matches what Scripture says, then you've probably hit the nail on the head.

The Trinity is a paradox. Our God is a paradox. He looks like nothing we've ever seen. One God in three persons. A son who is begotten of his father but not made by his father. A God who can simultaneously be perfectly just and perfectly merciful, even when those two attributes seem to be in complete contradiction of each other.

A God who is spirit, immortal, invisible, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. And yet, at the same time, a God who is flesh and blood and eats and sleeps and laughs and cries and lives and dies. And, oh yeah... rises from the dead.

Our God exceeds any analogy that the mind of man could ever invent, because he exceeds our ability to even describe him. He exceeds all of our expectations. All of our hopes. All of our needs. He is more than any thing we've ever seen or experienced in this life.

And so, it is this God in whom we put our trust. It is in this God that we put our faith. It is this God whom we call Yahweh and Lord and Christ and Savior and Jesus. It is this God whom we call Triune. Even though it's confusing. Even though it's a little boring. Because it is this God – and only this God – who came to save us. Amen.